DC COMICS
VERTIGO

JOE R. LANSDALE

BLOOD AND SHADOWS

MARK A. NELSON

BLOOD & SHADOWS
BOOK THREE
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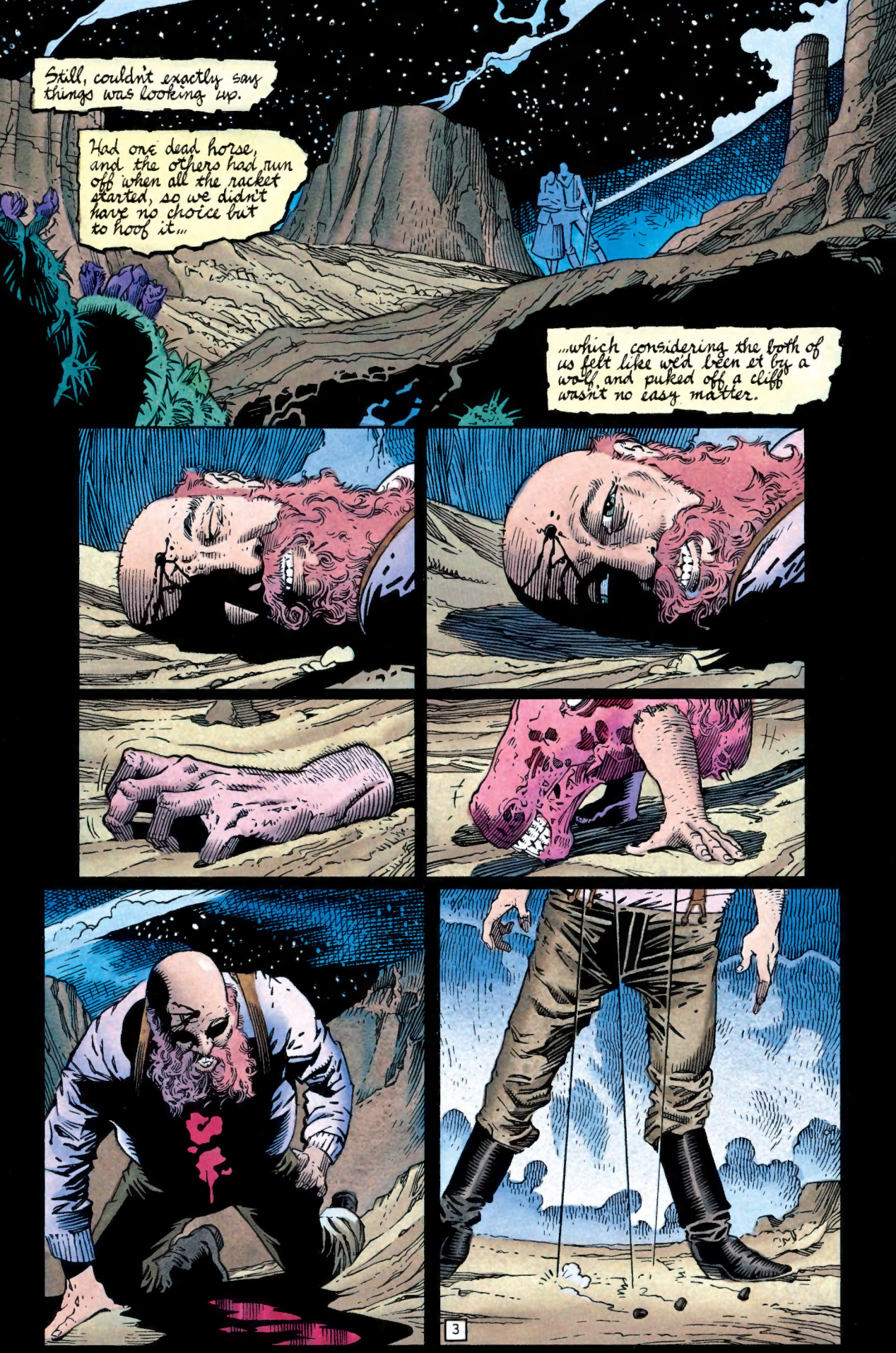
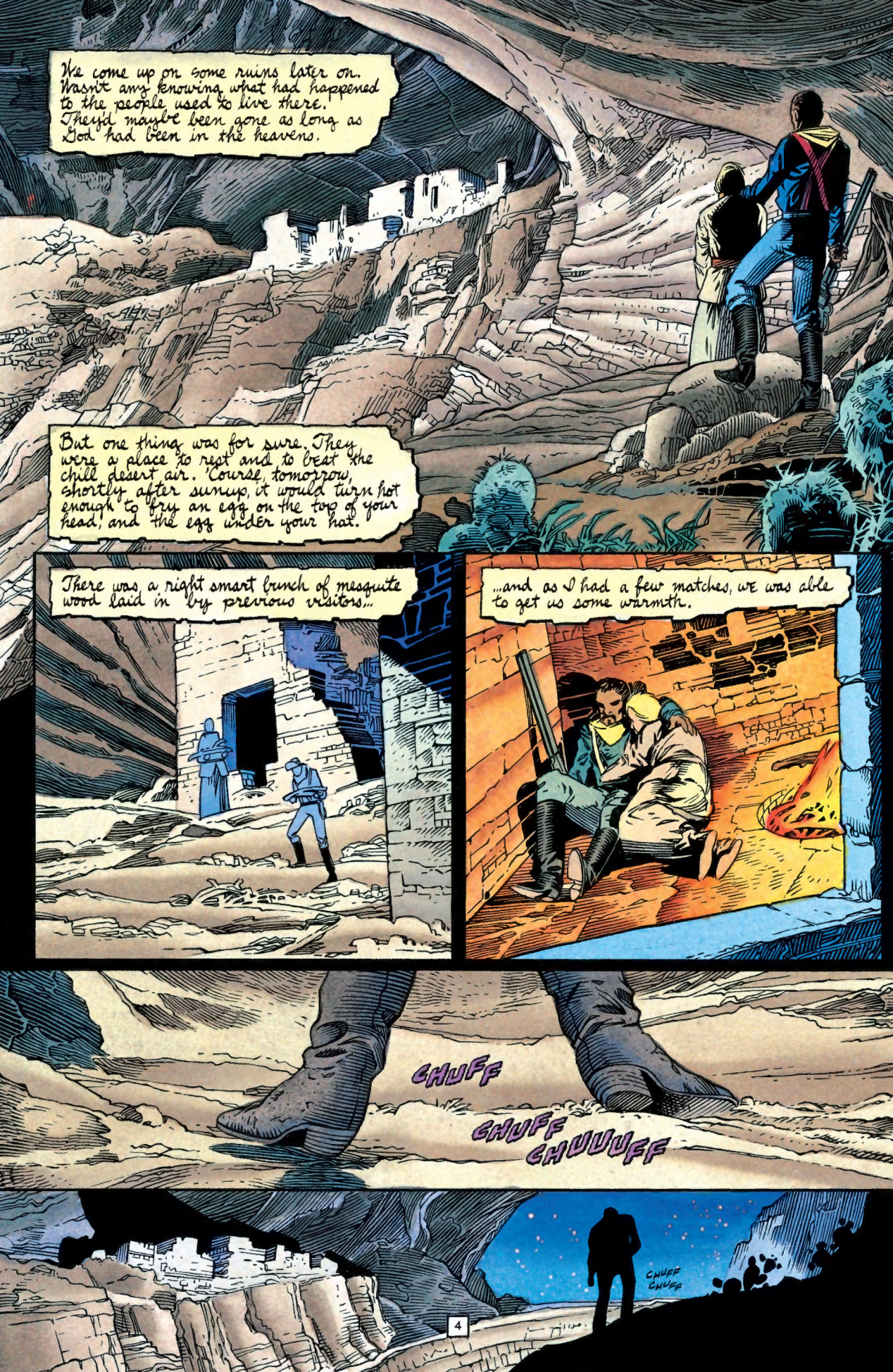
From the journal of Justice Jones...

BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
After I woke up, I shot the living hell out of Kileen, just in case he might be feeling a mite better than he looked...
...then I gave him a decent burial.
None of them body pieces came after me, so I figured when Kileen was out of commission, so were they.
2


Still, couldn't exactly say things was looking up.
Had one dead horse, and the others had run off when all the racket started, so we didn't have no choice but to hoof it...
...which considering the both of us felt like we'd been et by a wolf, and puked off a cliff wasn't no easy matter.


We come up on some ruins later on. Wasn't any knowing what had happened to the people used to live there. They'd maybe been gone as long as God had been in the heavens.
But one thing was for sure. They were a place to rest and to beat the chill desert air. 'Course, tomorrow, shortly after sunup, it would turn hot enough to fry an egg on the top of your head, and the egg under your hat.
There was a right smart brunch of mesquite wood laid in by previous visitors...
...and as I had a few matches, we was able to get us some warmth.
CHUFF
CHUFF
CHUUUFF
CHUFF
CHUFF
4

The fire had burned low and that drop off the cliff had made me feel only a little better than dead.
I guess that was fortunate.
The pain and the cold woke me up.
CLICK
BLAM

SNICK

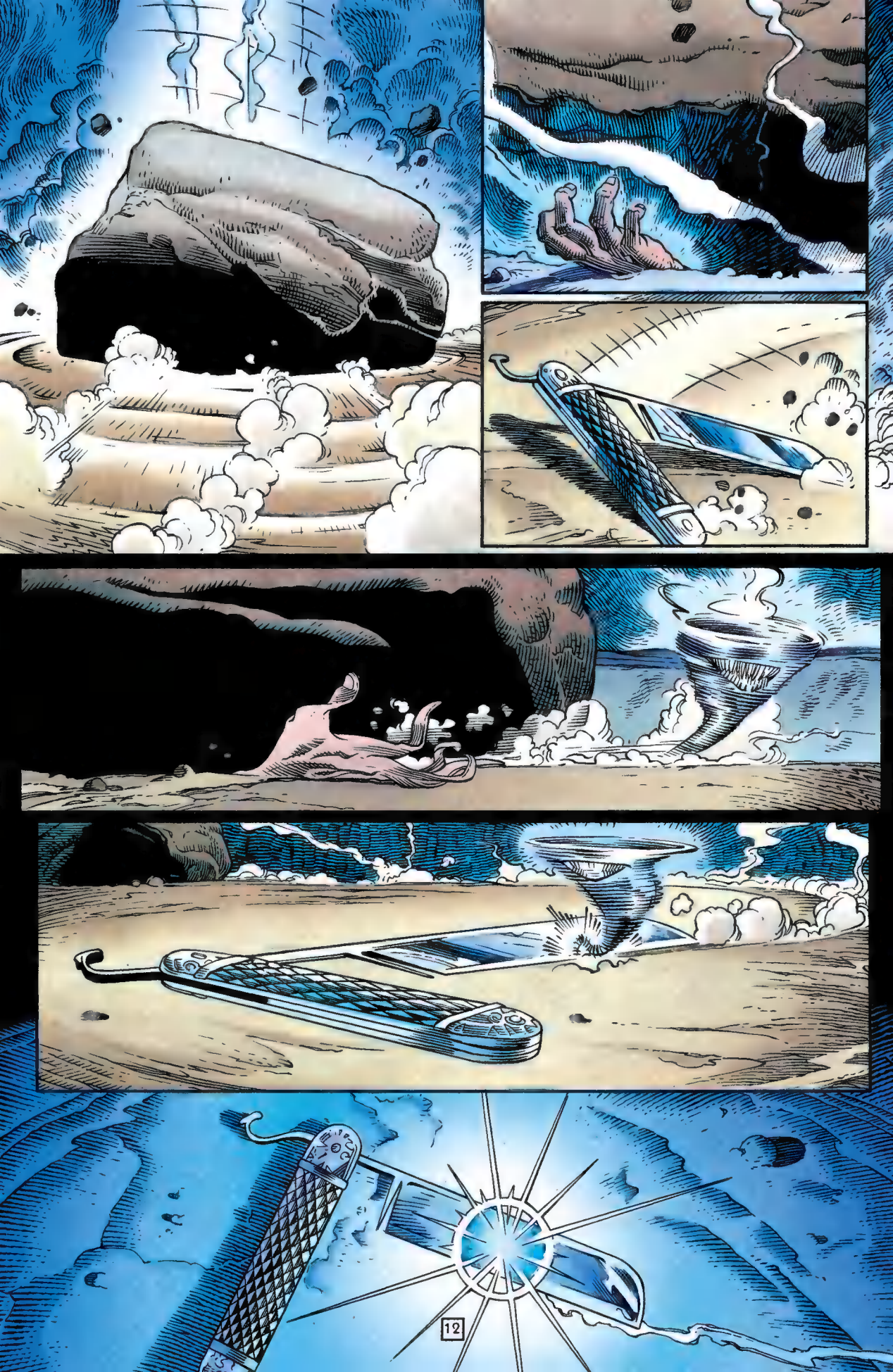
BLAM

CRACK
CRACK
8

CRACK
WHACK

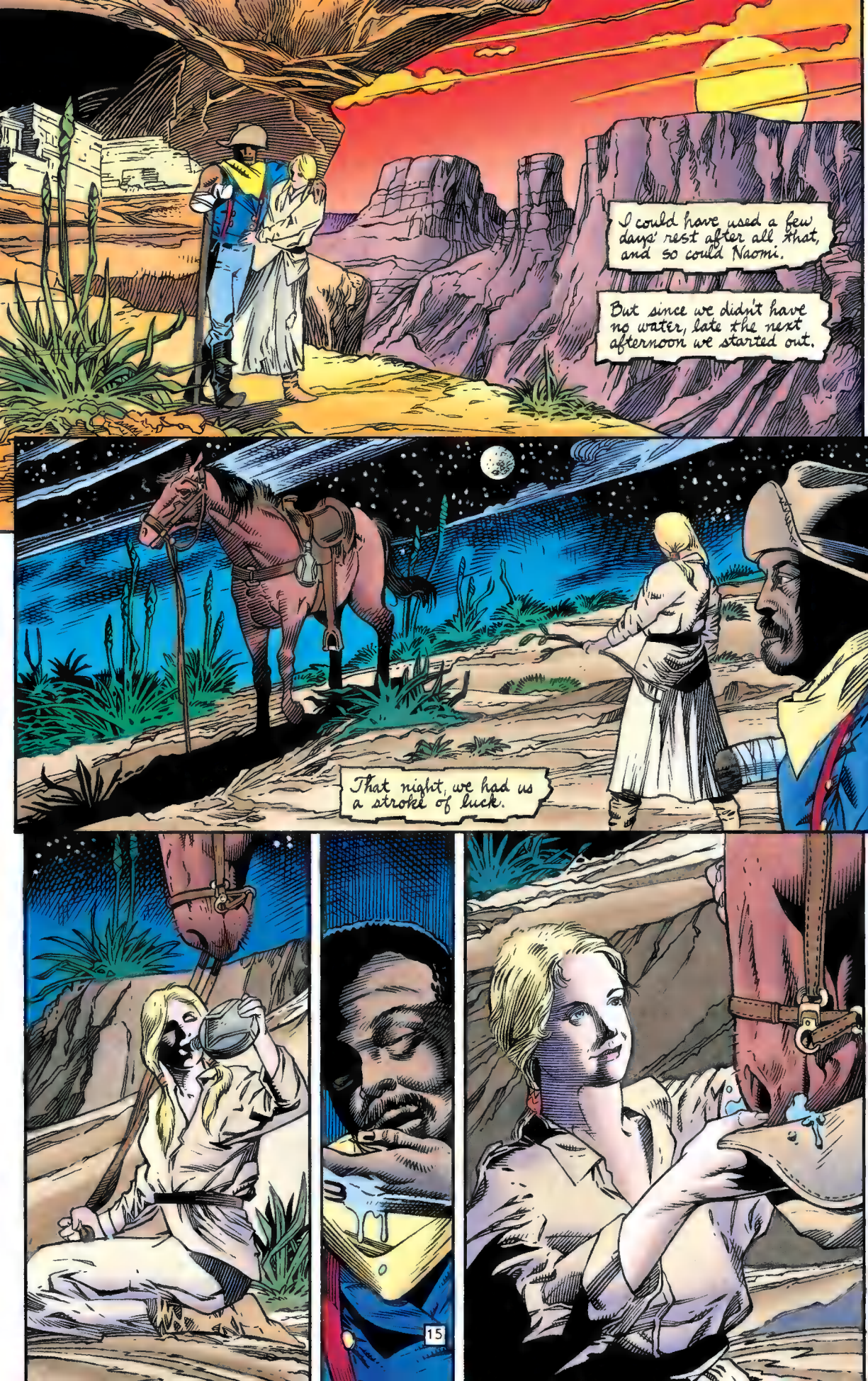
PUNT

NO! I'M CHANGING!

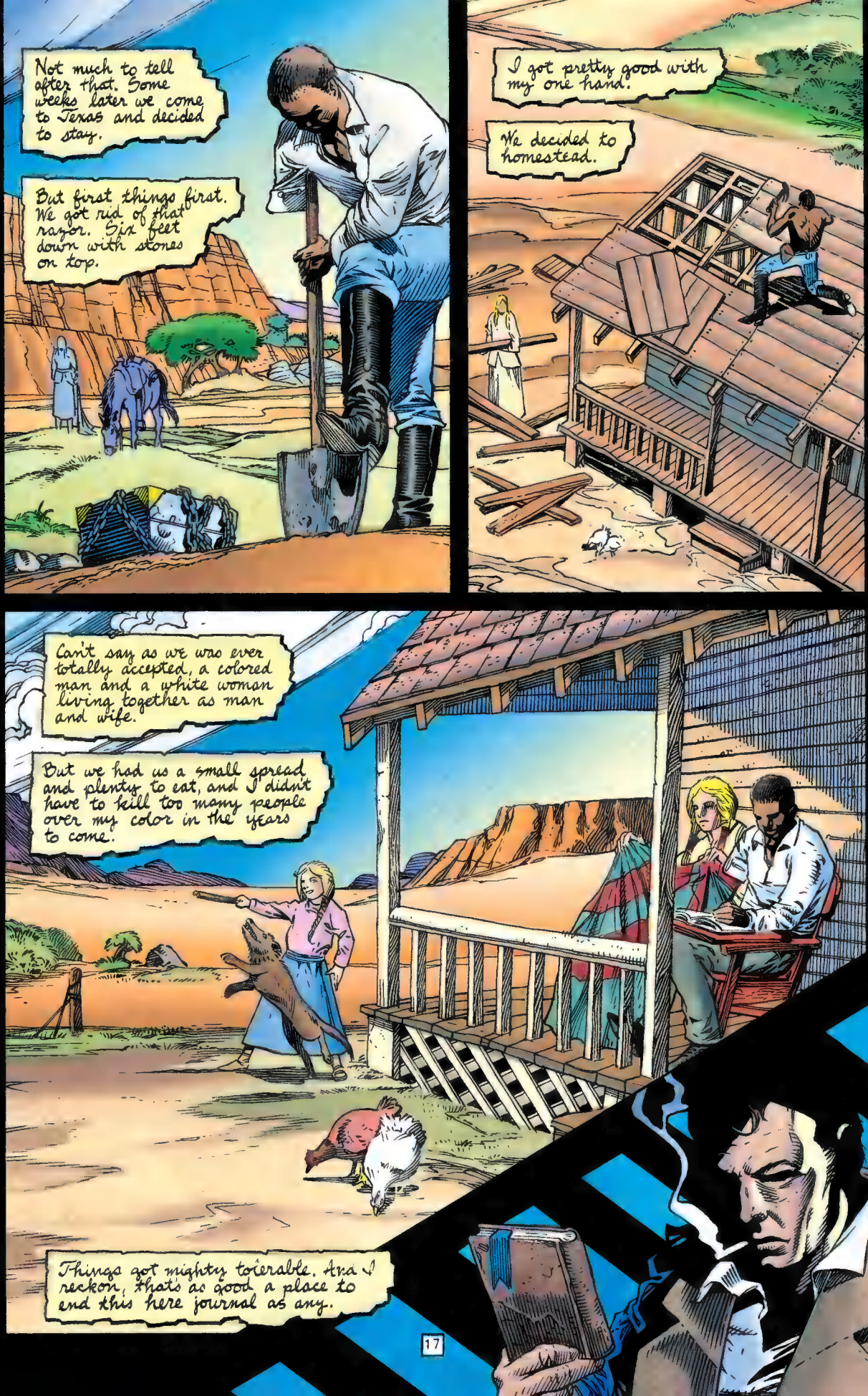


I was a might peaked as Naomi helped me back to my bedroll, and I was struck with an ugly thought.
The razor had cut me same as Kileen, and it had turned him into a big, ole nasty fella with a top hat and some funny teeth.
And if I was a good guesser, in a real short time I was gonna be looking for that razor, and if I found it, I was gonna be wearing a top hat.
NAOMI, HONEY, I GOT A FAVOR TO ASK.

Figured if I got the arm cut off above the razor's poison, I'd be right as rain in no time. Well, almost.
I wasn't looking forward to this, considering I had quite a hunk of meat to lose yet.
Naomi went to her work certain as a preacher preachin' the gospel. I only passed out a couple times.
She had to work the knife through the bone, then cauterize the ends of the wound by heating up the blade again.


I could have used a few days' rest after all that, and so could Naomi.
But since we didn't have no water, late the next afternoon we started out.
That night, we had us a stroke of luck.

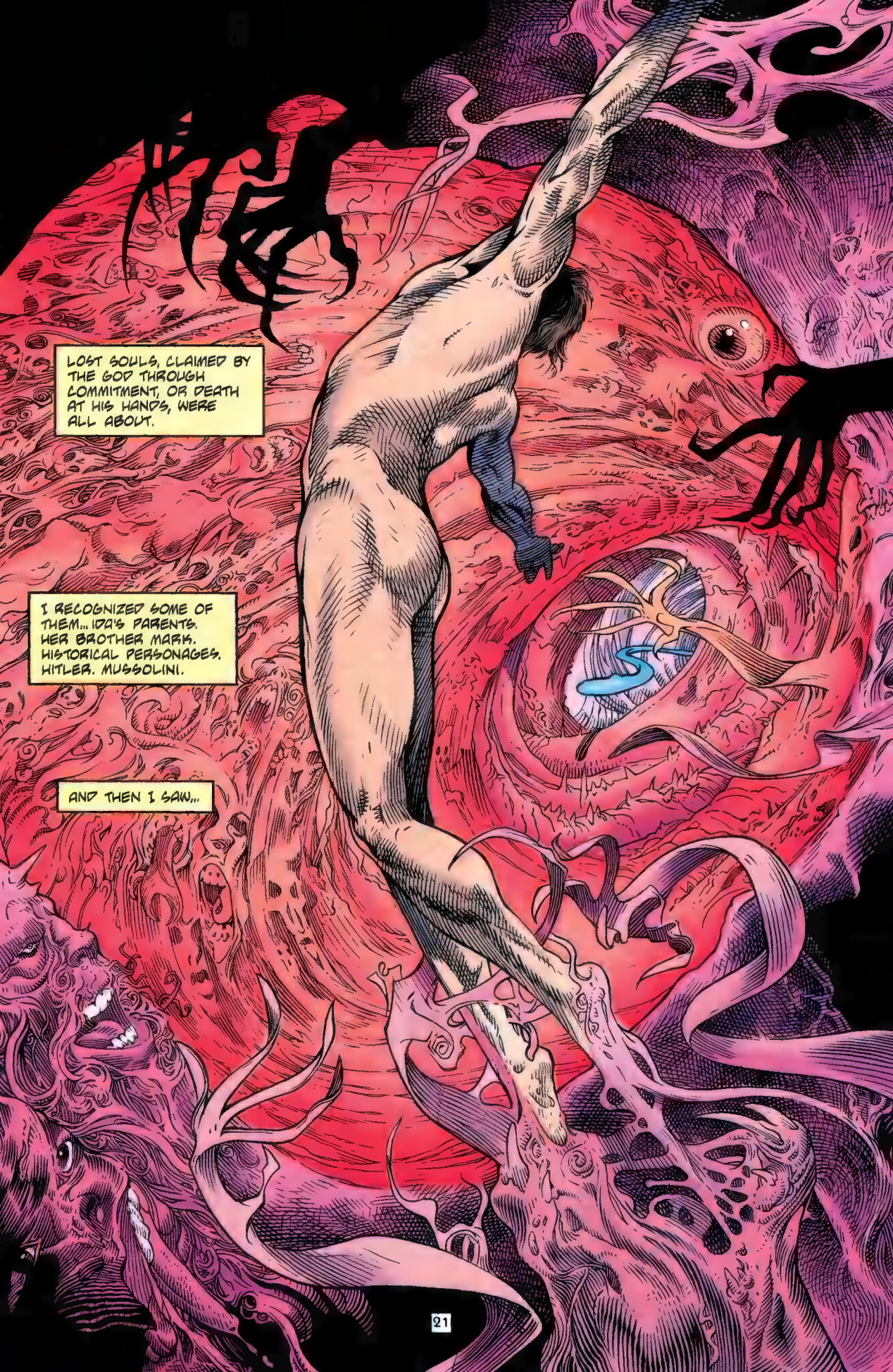
We bade old Kileen adios.
Then we came up on that damn razor.
Wasn't no way we could leave that lying about.

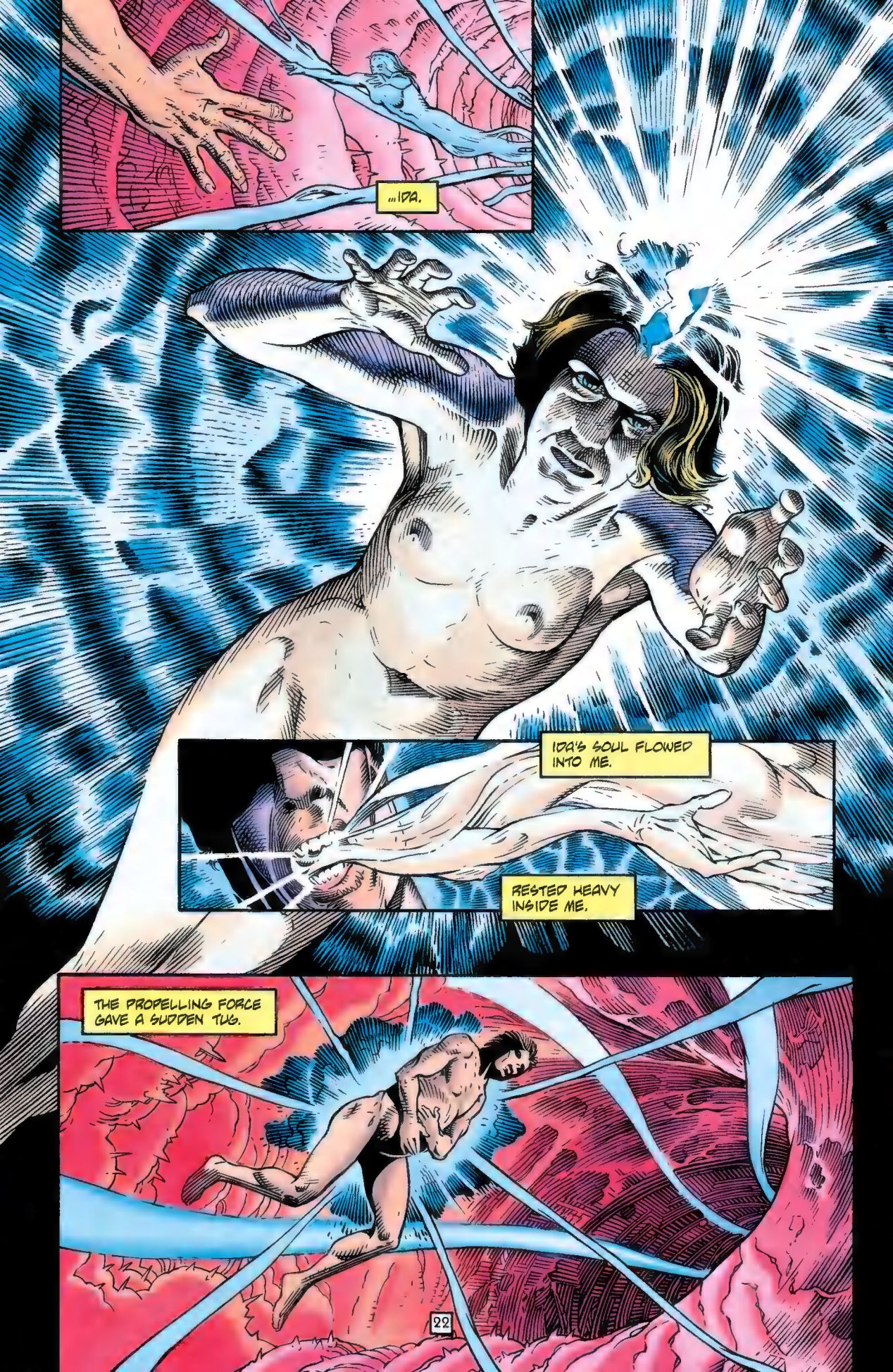

Not much to tell after that. Some weeks later we come to Texas and decided to stay.
But first things first. We got rid of that razor. Six feet down with stones on top.
I got pretty good with my one hand.
We decided to homestead.
Can't say as we was ever totally accepted, a colored man and a white woman living together as man and wife.
But we had us a small spread and plenty to eat, and I didn't have to kill too many people over my color in the years to come.
Things got mighty tolerable. And I reckon, that's as good a place to end this here journal as any.

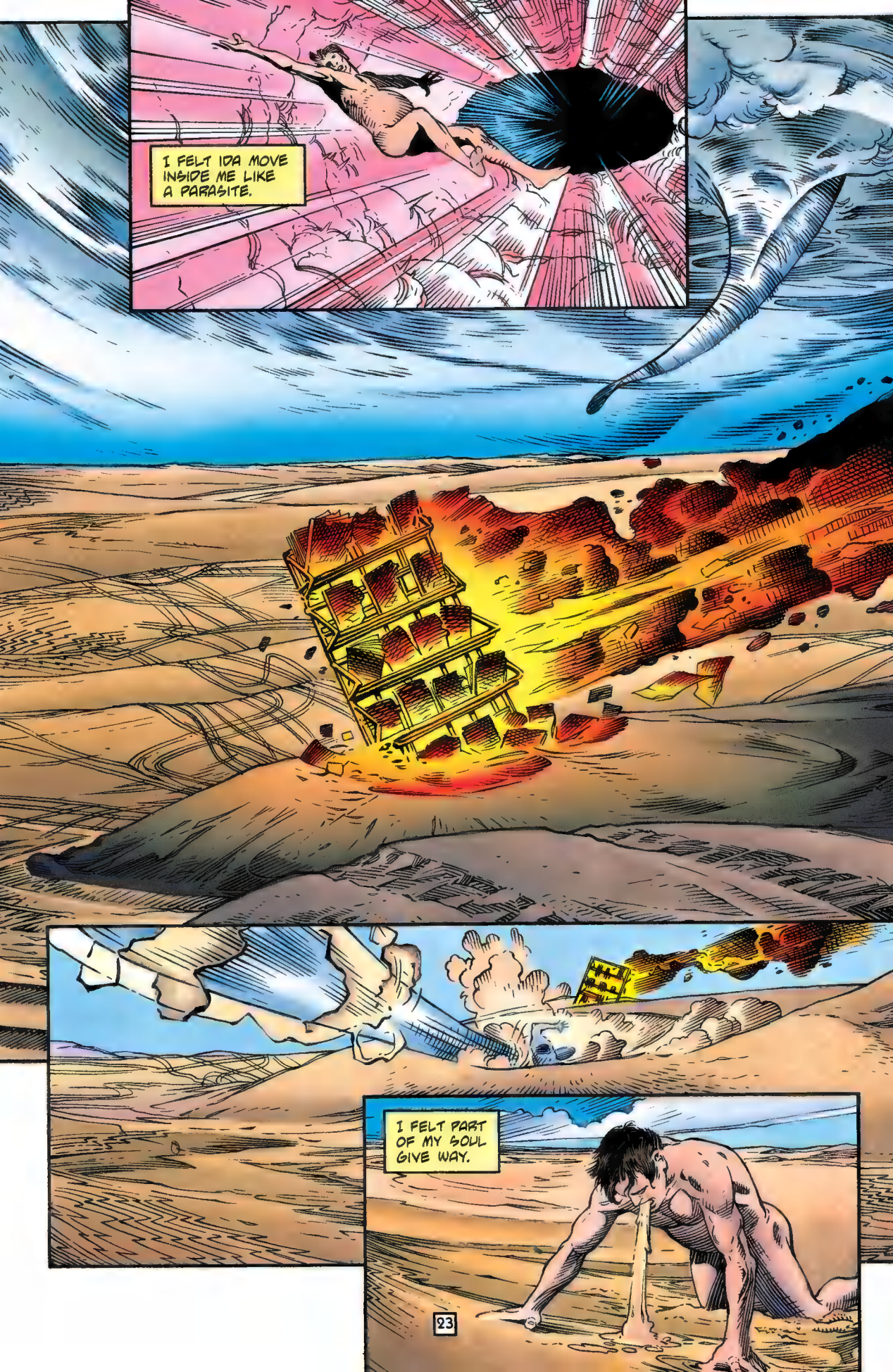
BUT THE RAZOR HADN'T STAYED BURIED. A MANMADE LAKE AND TIME COULDN'T HOLD IT. MARY HAD CALLED IT FORTH FROM THE BOOK OF DOCHES.
JUSTICE'S JOURNAL DIDN'T END WHERE HE HAD INTENDED. THERE WAS AN ADDITION DATED 1923. I DIDN'T READ IT. WHAT I WANTED TO KNOW I NOW KNEW. THE GOD COULD BE DEFEATED. IDA COULD BE AVENGED.
NEXT THING TO KNOW WAS HOW TO GO AFTER THE GOD OF THE RAZOR. SOMETHING I HOPED THE SKINBOUND BOOK WOULD ANSWER. AND AFTER AN HOUR OF READING, IT DID.
AND WHEN I CAME ACROSS THAT ANSWER, MY RESOLVE WEAKENED.
FOR A MOMENT.
BECAUSE THE BOOK ALLOWED THAT NOT ONLY COULD I FOLLOW THE GOD, BUT I COULD HAVE IDA BACK. MY BELOVED IDA.
THAT PUT STEEL IN MY BONES. EVEN IF THE ANSWER HAD TO DO WITH THE GOD'S MIRROR WORLD... AND THE BRAINS OF A BELOVED.

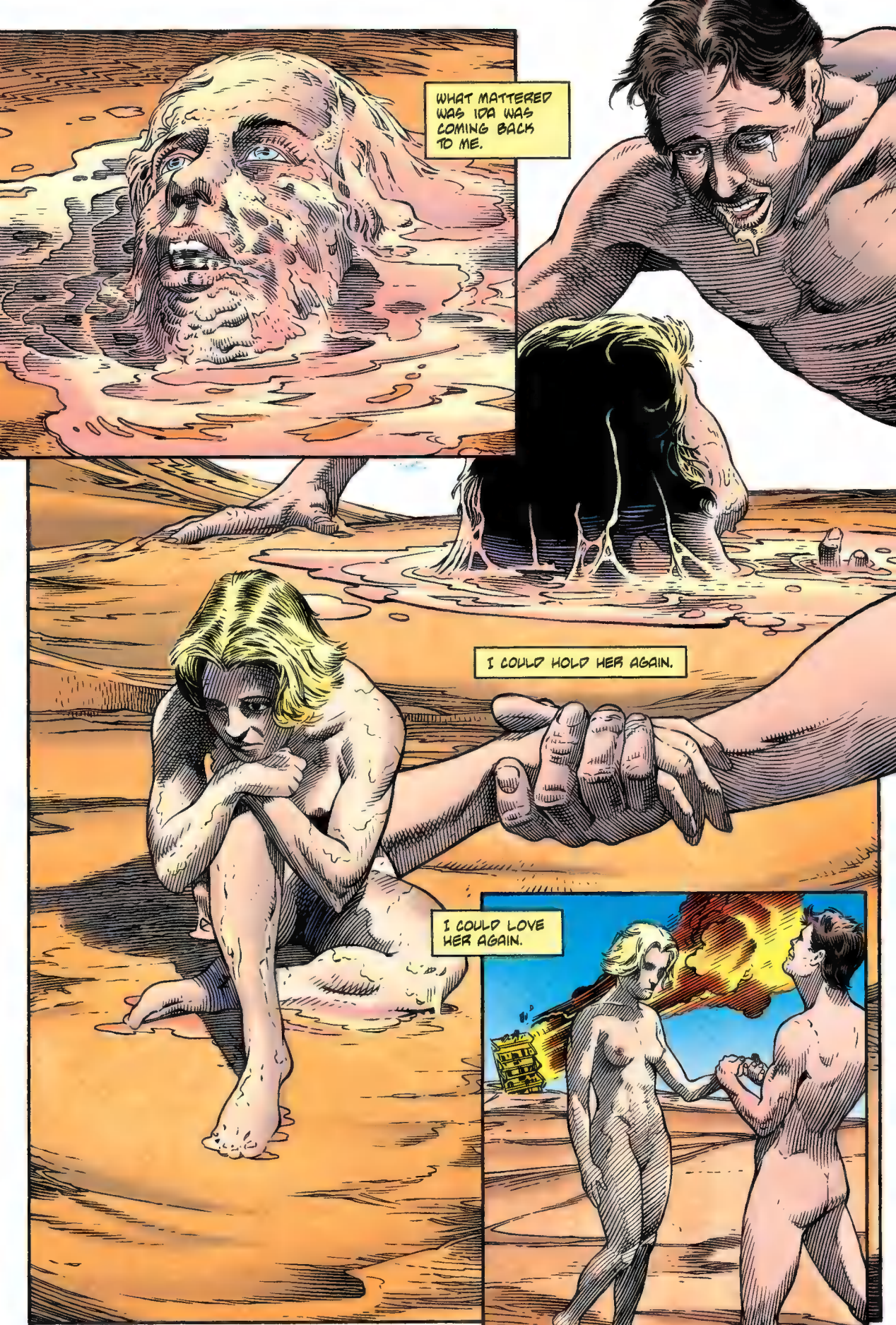
FIRST I HAD TO HAVE THE BRAINS.
GRRRAAAACCKKK
I LOVE YOU, IDA.
THEN I HAD TO DO SOMETHING TERRIBLE.
NEXT, I HAD TO READ ALOUD THE SPELL WHICH SOUNDED LIKE NONSENSE TO ME. AND IT HAD NO RHYME.
TA EBRAINS DNADETHGIL. TA ES HITDNAITS LATHGIR. HA YE HA YE.

THINGS STARTED HAPPENING RIGHT AWAY.
THE MIRROR SEEMED TO CALL.
I DIDN'T FIGHT IT. I WANTED TO DESTROY THE GOD OF THE RAZOR. AND I WANTED IDA BACK.
THE HORROR OF THE MIRROR WORLD REACHED OUT FOR ME, AS IF I WERE A TAXI TO FREEDOM.
BUT I WAS PROTECTED BY THE SPELL THAT WAS LEADING ME TO THE GOD OF THE RAZOR.

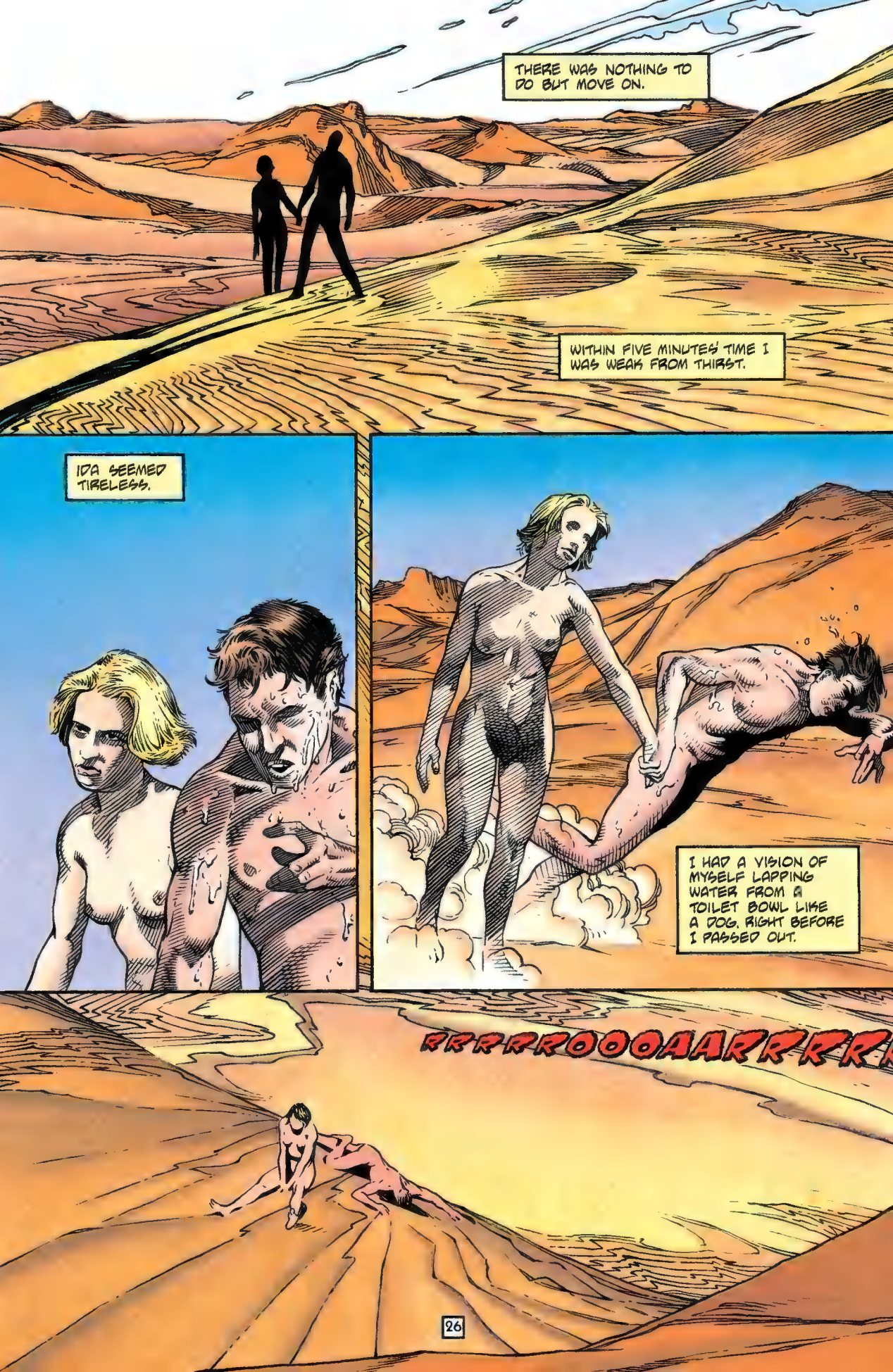

LOST SOULS, CLAIMED BY THE GOD THROUGH COMMITMENT, OR DEATH AT HIS HANDS, WERE ALL ABOUT.
I RECOGNIZED SOME OF THEM... IDA'S PARENTS. HER BROTHER MARK. HISTORICAL PERSONAGES. HITLER. MUSSOLINI.
AND THEN I SAW...


...IDA.
IDA'S SOUL FLOWED INTO ME.
RESTED HEAVY INSIDE ME.
THE PROPELLING FORCE GAVE A SUDDEN TUG.


I FELT IDA MOVE INSIDE ME LIKE A PARASITE.
I FELT PART OF MY SOUL GIVE WAY.

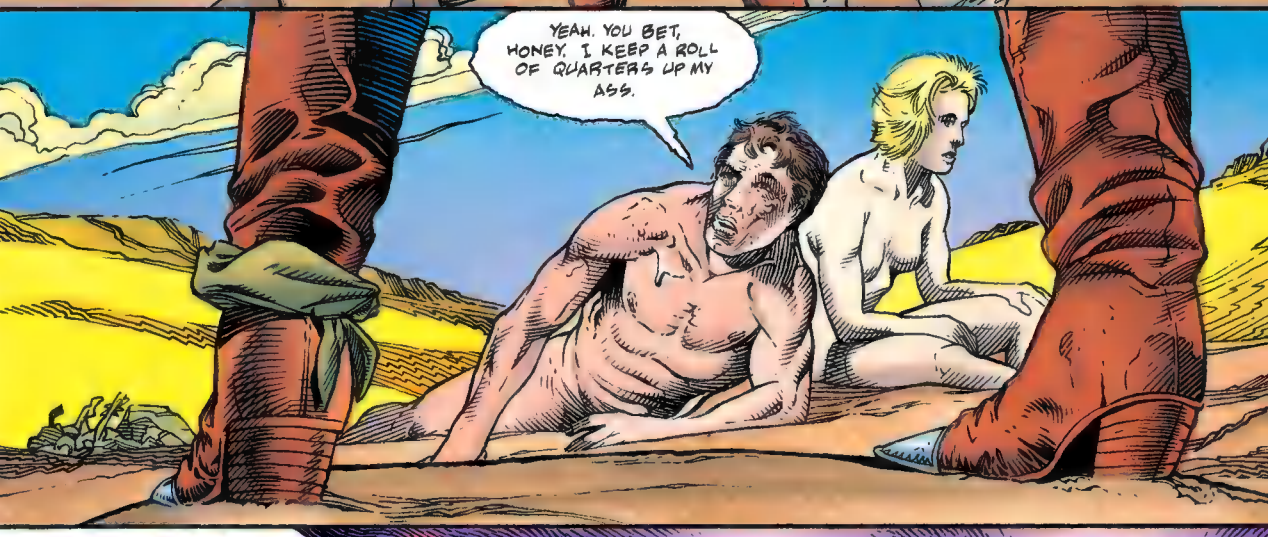

WHAT MATTERED WAS IDA WAS COMING BACK TO ME.
I COULD HOLD HER AGAIN.
I COULD LOVE HER AGAIN.

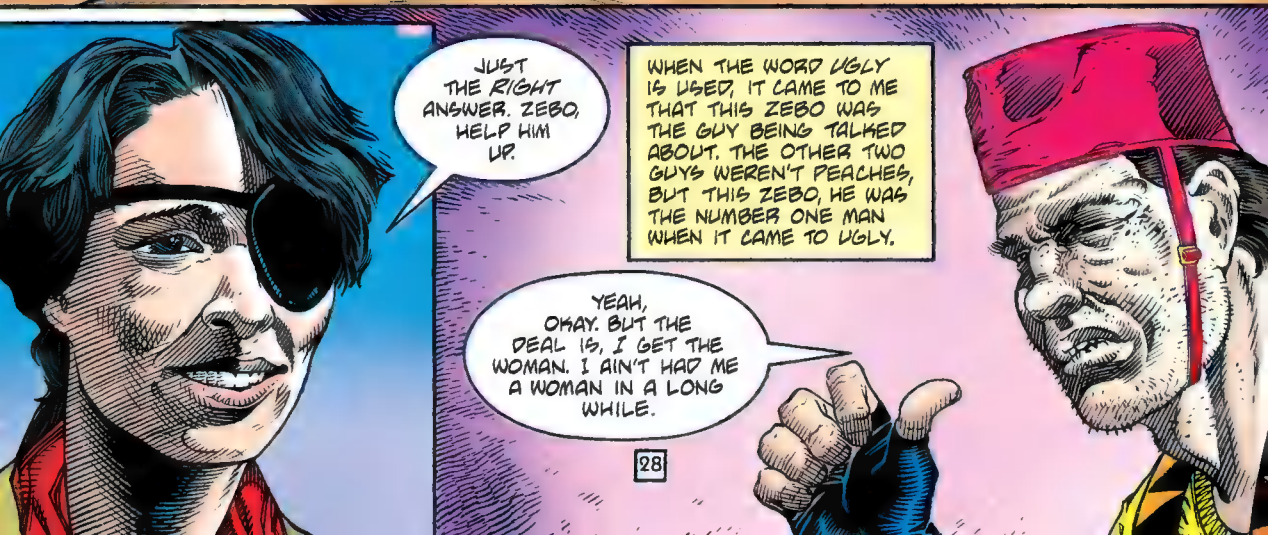
IDA?


THERE WAS NOTHING TO DO BUT MOVE ON.
WITHIN FIVE MINUTES' TIME I WAS WEAK FROM THIRST.
IDA SEEMED TIRELESS.
I HAD A VISION OF MYSELF LAPPING WATER FROM A TOILET BOWL LIKE A DOG. RIGHT BEFORE I PASSED OUT.
RRRRROOOAARRRR

RRUUAAARRRR
HEY, BOY. YOU ALIVE?
27

WATER... COCA-COLA...
YOU GOT MONEY TO BUY IT?

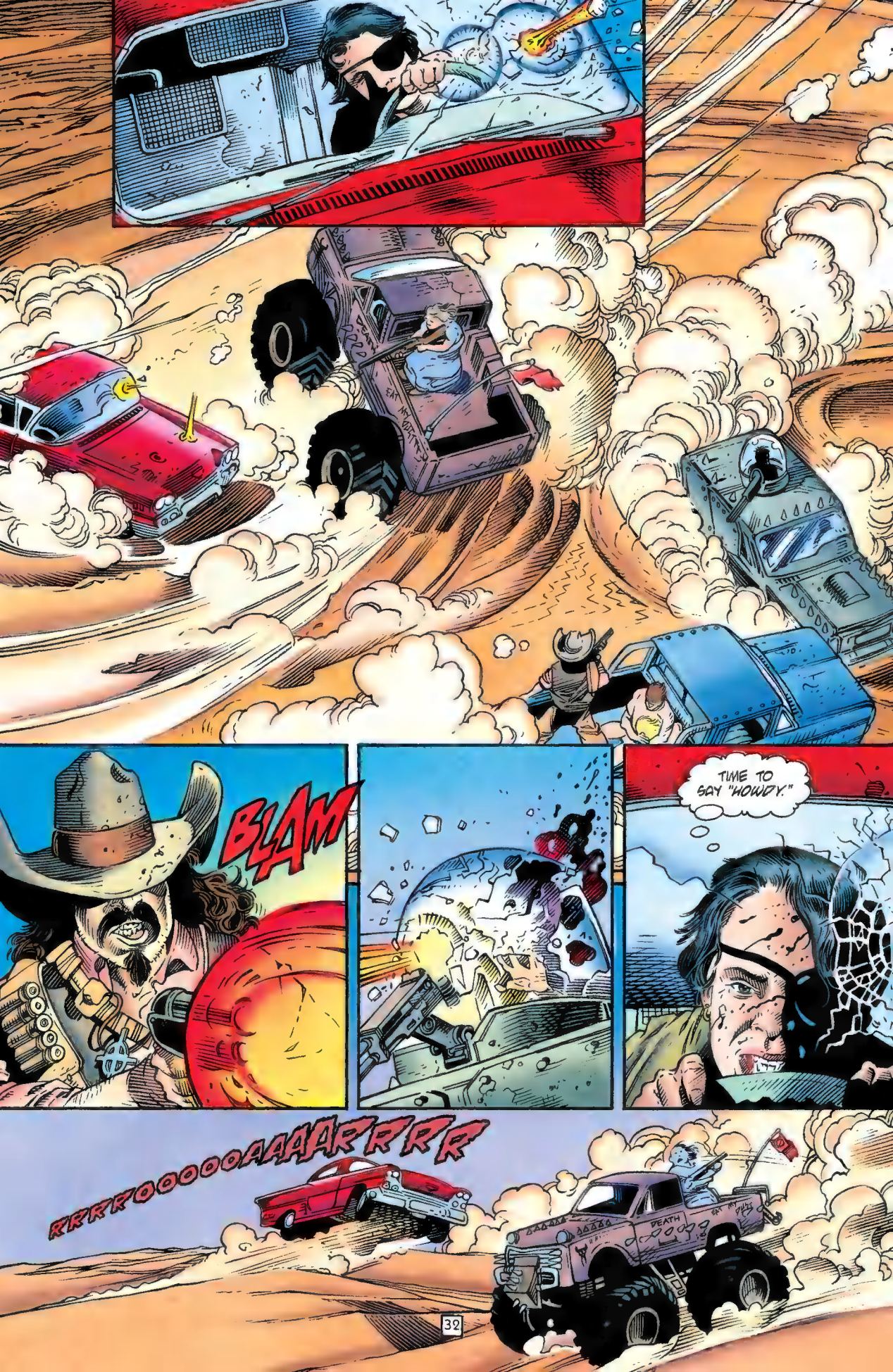

YEAH. YOU BET, HONEY. I KEEP A ROLL OF QUARTERS UP MY ASS.


JUST THE RIGHT ANSWER. ZEBO, HELP HIM UP.
WHEN THE WORD UGLY IS USED, IT CAME TO ME THAT THIS ZEBO WAS THE GUY BEING TALKED ABOUT. THE OTHER TWO GUYS WEREN'T PEACHES, BUT THIS ZEBO, HE WAS THE NUMBER ONE MAN WHEN IT CAME TO UGLY.
YEAH, OKAY. BUT THE DEAL IS, I GET THE WOMAN. I AIN'T HAD ME A WOMAN IN A LONG WHILE.

I KNEW BAD THINGS WERE COMING, BUT I WAS TOO WEAK TO PREVENT THEM.
LAST ONE YOU HAD WAS YOUR LAST, ZEBO.
PROVIDENCE TOOK A HAND.
SHE'D HAVE MADE WILD BILL HICKOK LOOK LIKE A PIKER.
NO DEAL!
THE ATTRIBUTE OF STUPIDITY ONLY GOES SO FAR IN A MAN.
I DIDN'T GET THE IMPRESSION THAT ZEBO WOULD BE MISSED.
I BEEN 'SPECTIN' THIS.
YEAH, ZEBO DIDN'T NEVER FIT IN.

YOU TWO HELP THIS OLE BOY UP, WILL YOU, PLEASE?
BY THE WAY, WHAT THE HELL'S A... COCA-COLA?
THIS PLACE WAS MORE BARBARIC THAN I THOUGHT.
I SEE 'EM.
LET'S SEE 'EM CLOSER.

SWEETIE'S SPOTTED SOME PIRATES.
MONEY IN THE BANK.
BOUNTY HUNTERS INC.
1-800-BOUNTY
I HAD BEGUN TO THINK THIS PLACE WAS GOING TO MAKE HELL LOOK LIKE A VACATION SPOT.
THIS OUGHTN'T TO TAKE LONG, BUT IF SOME FOOL THAT AIN'T ONE OF US GETS IN THE BED HERE, SHOOT HIM, WILL YOU?
AND HANG ONTO SOMETHING.
DEATH
EAT MY DUST


BLAM
TIME TO SAY "HOWDY."
RRRROOOOOAAAARRRR
DEATH

DEATH
FACE FART
DEATH TO

BLAM

WHUMP
ka-chic BLAM
ka-chic BLAM

KA-WHUMP
SSZRUUNZZHHUH
PLEASE... DON'T, MISTER.
ka-chic
SORRY, KID...
BUT THE MONEY'S THE SAME, DEAD OR ALIVE.
BLAM!
YOU WOULDN'T HAVE LIKED LABOR CAMP, ANYWAY.

BRULEY, YOU IDIOT. I'VE TOLD YOU BEFORE NOT TO SHOOT 'EM IN THE HEAD. THAT'LL COST US.
NO HEAD, NO BREAD.
WELL, SIR. SEEMED LIKE THE THING TO DO AT THE TIME. BESIDES...
...HELL, FRANK. YOU'RE BEHIND THE TIMES.
THEY DON'T JUST GO BY DENTAL WORK. THEY GO BY FINGERPRINTS TOO.

IT GONNA RUN, SWEETIE?
PURRS LIKE A KITTEN.
RRRR
WELL, THEN, LET'S VIBRATE.
THE SPELL FROM THE BOOK HAD BROUGHT ME HERE TO THIS STRANGE PLACE. THIS SEWER FOR HUMANITY. BUT WHERE WAS THE GOD OF THE RAZOR?

WHEREVER WE WERE, IT WASN'T EXACTLY MY IDEA OF PARADISE.
THE NATIVES HAD A SENSE OF HUMOR, ALL RIGHT.
BUT IT WASN'T ONE I SHARED.

RRROOOAARRR
CRUNCH

DAMN.
BET HE'D A' BURNED COUPLE MORE MINUTES AT LEAST.
RECKON WE COULDA CHASED THAT DAMN DILLER ALL THE WAY TO THE CHILD ABUSE CLINIC.
NAH, ON FIRE LIKE THAT, THEY START GOIN' IN CIRCLES AFTER A BIT.
I WISHED SUDDENLY I HADN'T KICKED OLE RUFUS... THE POODLE.
BASTARDS!
GODDAMN IDIOTS!

HONK
HONK HONK
AIN'T SHE THE CUTEST THING, BRUCEY?
I KNOW SHE CHEERS ME UP.
BOUNTY INC.

328
327
ZEKE
ALIAS:
RAY SLATER
FRED BROWN
VANCE JACK
BILL CRIDER
CARL HAASEN
BODY SHOP
PARK
KINDA TAKES EVERYTHING IN STRIDE, DON'T SHE?
RECKON SO.
HERE, THIS'LL HELP WITH THE STINK. BEEN DIPPED IN DEODORIZER.
43

RING BELL
BOUNTY BOX
HANDS AND HEADS ONLY
AIN'T THAT YOUR MAN ZEBO?
JUST LOOKS LIKE HIM.
OXY
THAT A PROBLEM?
NO. NO PROBLEM.
GOOD. I HATE PROBLEMS.
BOUNTY WORKERS--
CHECK ALL HEADS AND HANDS AGAINST COMPUTER IDENTIFICATION. WHEN IN DOUBT, BUY ANYWAY.
REMEMBER WHAT'S IMPORTANT:
POPULATION CONTROL
AND FOOD SUPPLY.
SWEETIE
BOUNTY BOX

ZEBO WASN'T A PIRATE... WAS HE?
WE'RE ALL PIRATES, I RECKON. BUT WE'RE SANCTIONED BY THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS. SO WAS ZEBO.
REPUBLIC?
WHERE THE HELL YOU FROM, BOY?
UH...UP NORTH.
THAT EXPLAINS IT.
WHAT THE HELL THEY PIRATING ANYWAY?
THEY WEREN'T PIRATING NOTHIN' WHEN WE COME ON 'EM, BUT THEY'D JUST MADE A RUN.
A RUN OF WHAT?

MEAT, BOY. WHAT DO YOU THINK? HUMAN MEAT FROM THE HOSPITAL DISEASE WARD'S.
YER PULLIN' ME...
HELL I AM. THERE'S PEOPLE OVER IN WACO AND ACROSS THE BORDER IN OKLAHOMA WILL EAT ANY GODDAMN THING.
OH.
DIDN'T I UNDERSTAND THEY GO BY DENTAL RECORDS AND FINGERPRINTS? AND IF ZEBO WASN'T A PIRATE...
THEY GO BY THAT STUFF 'CEPT WHEN THEY DON'T.
TOO MANY PEOPLE ANYWAY. AND ZEBO WAS AN ASS.
SORT BY CRANIUM
BESIDES, WHO WANTS TO ARGUE WITH SWEETIE?
450A
LET'S VIBRATE.

AT LEAST THEIR PLACE MADE ME FEEL AT HOME, EXCEPT FOR THE FACT THAT I MISSED THE CLAUSTROPHOBIA.
AND, OF COURSE, THE SMELLS FROM THE BACKED-UP TOILET DOWN THE HALL. THE SMELLS WEREN'T QUITE THAT BAD. THEY JUST MADE YOUR STOMACH ROLL A BIT.
I WONDERED IF MA SHINER HAD KEPT MY ROOM WAITING FOR ME. MAYBE PUT A LITTLE PLAQUE ON THE DOOR, LIKE A SHRINE MAYBE. NAH... PROBABLY ALREADY MOVED IN A COUPLE OF WINOS.
YOU GET A MEAL AND THAT'S IT. I SHOULD'VE SHOT YOU BOTH AND TRADED IN YOUR HEADS.
WHY DIDN'T YOU?
YOU LOOKED TOO GODDAMN PITIFUL. I'M A SOFTIE AT HEART.
...HIT ME WITH ONE.
WHAT THE HELL YOU TWO DOIN' IN THAT DESERT ANYWAY?
AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HER BRAINS?
GETTING A TAN.
AND YOU DON'T WORRY ABOUT HER BRAINS.

ANOTHER HOUR AND YOU'D HAVE BEEN TANNED TO DEATH.
YOU OUGHT TO SHOOT THAT GAL AND PUT HER OUT OF HER MISERY. ONLY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HER AND A BRICK IS SHE CAN WALK.
OH, I IMAGINE THERE'S A THING OR TWO YOU CAN DO TO HER THAT YOU CAN'T DO TO A BRICK. AM I RIGHT, BOY?
OLD NUKE
Redneck
WHICH ONE OF YOU SMART ASSES IS FIRST?
YOU'RE THE UGLIEST, SO COME ON.
I WIN!
Kiss Yer Ass Bye
TO BE CONTINUED

It spread death across the ages...

For private eye Chet Daly nothing could be worse than the horror he'd already faced. He'd seen murderous devastation spread across his east Texas hometown and he'd lost the love of his life to a kill-crazy monster known as The God of the Razor. If that weren't enough, the old journals of a frontier scout named Justice Jones showed Chet that the thing might well be unstoppable. Drenched in his girlfriend Ida's blood, Chet prayed that it was over. But it wasn't — not by a long shot.

Swept into a mad dimensional maelstrom, Chet inexplicably finds himself in a far-flung dystopic future with a mysteriously revived Ida. Falling in with a hard-case bounty hunter named Sweetie and her band of hardened killers, Chet's life only gets crazier.

Chet will have to survive insane desert car chases, gunfights with lunatic good-old-boys from the future — and worse — if he's to find a way to save Ida's soul and take her home.

But they're not the only ones crossing to this strange time. Out in the desert, pale moonlight glints off razor-sharp teeth and a low, eerie chuckle signals the continuation of an ages-old demonic evil.

Best-selling horror and suspense novelist Joe R. Lansdale and acclaimed artist Mark A. Nelson join their prodigious talents to bring you this shocking tale of love, adventure and unending dread.

Suggested for mature readers

SPECIAL DELIVERY

D'ARGH-EMPIRE